
Wednesday
Five O'Clocks

The Royal Conservatory of Music of Toronto



SEASON 1948 - 49
FIRST CONCERT
NOVEMBER 24

Programme

Quartet in C minor, Opus 51, No. 1

Brahms

Allegro

Romanze: Poco adagio

Allegretto molto moderato e comodo

Allegro

Brahms was the severest of self-critics. This fact is borne out by the often-noted late appearance of the First Symphony, and may be just as strongly corroborated by the extreme caution with which Brahms approached the string quartet medium. This his first quartet appeared when he was nearly forty, and it was, he himself admitted, preceded by at least twenty destroyed or remodelled quartets. The result of all this weeding and constant self-examination is a work of concise proportions yet of immense power.

The opening Allegro is stormy and terse. Its massive ideas naturally call for a generous amount of multiple stopping; and it may be further proof of the sanity of Brahms' cautious approach that this fullness of scoring never detracts from the movement's essential "quartetness": the instruments never lose their individuality. The Romanze is surprisingly concise compared with the slow movements of works which had preceded this, although its richness of texture and fascinating rhythmic construction belie the simplicity of its design. The "light" movement (characteristically an Allegretto) is somewhat reminiscent of the third movement of the Third Symphony, combining grace of figuration with a certain pathos of expression. The Trio exploits a favorite special effect in the second violin: the alternating of the same note on open and stopped string. Although the Quartet as a whole is not obviously "cyclic", i.e., does not audibly carry over the same theme from movement to movement, in the manner so beloved of Vincent d'Indy, yet the Finale contains pointed allusions to both the Allegro and the Romanze. Here again the brevity of the movement is remarkable in view of its power and its aptness as an epilogue to the Quartet.

Quartet in D major, Opus 25

(First Canadian performance)

Britten

Andante sostenuto—Allegro vivo

Allegretto con slancio

Andante calmo

Molto vivace

This work was written in America in the early years of World War II. It is dedicated to Mrs. Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, and was probably commissioned by that remarkable patroness of chamber music.

Britten seems to have had from his cradle complete appreciation of fitness-to-medium as a composer. His youthful songs are made to be sung; his early orchestral works are nothing if not luminous in scoring. His style has grown, and will grow, in other ways, but in this technical aspect it has never been short of maturity. It is scarcely surprising to find, then, that his first string quartet fits its instruments, and is carefully groomed to this end in an impressive array of obscure Italian directions, a pardonable literary affectation in a brilliant and sensitive young artist.

The opening movement alternates between a serene Andante, in which the upper voices expand in sustained close harmony over a curious pizzicato formula in the 'cello, and a bold Allegro vivo. There follows a saucy Allegretto ("con slancio" is a curious qualification: it means "with impetuosity"), a model of clarity in figuration and of genuineness in climax. The tranquil Andante is pure 5-4 motion, nothing stagnant and nothing that could be phrased more easily in another time-signature. The announcement of a quietly energetic theme by the first violin starts the Finale on a plane of clear polyphony, such as has always been an exciting feature of Britten's work. The discussion of this one theme pervades the movement, with brief contrasts, and makes it a brilliant finish to a clear and brilliant first quartet.

Parlow String Quartet

Kathleen Parlow, violin

Samuel Hersenhoren, violin

Stanley Solomon, viola

Cornelius Ysselstyn, violoncello

Prog-1021

NEXT PROGRAMME

Bela Boszormenyi-Nagy

Pianist

Wednesday, December 8, at 5 p.m.

Toccata and Fugue in E minor	Bach
Adagio in B minor (K.540)	Mozart
Sonata in C minor, Opus 111	Beethoven
Three Intermezzi	Brahms
Two Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm	Bartok
Two Etudes	Debussy